

Disaster Planning and Preparedness

Commonly asked questions

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Why would I plan ahead for a disaster?

If a disaster occurs, local government and relief organizations will try to help you. But it is important to be as personally prepared as possible since immediately after an emergency essential services may be cut off. Local disaster relief and government responders may not be able to reach you right away.

How should I plan ahead for a disaster?

One of the most important steps you can take to prepare for emergencies is to develop a **household disaster plan**. Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter to learn how to prepare for a potential emergency and how to respond. Talk with employers and school officials about their emergency response plans. Talk with your household about potential emergencies and how to respond to them. Talk about what you would need to do in an evacuation.

- Make a household plan to deal with a sudden emergency. Decide how everyone in your household would stay in contact if you became separated. Identify two meeting places: the first should be near your home; the second should be away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home.
- Pick a friend or relative who lives outside the immediate area to serve as a household telephone contact. In an emergency, local phone connections may not work, but long distance may still function.
- Draw a floor plan of your home. Mark two escape routes from each room.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by telephones. Teach children how and when to call 911.

- Make sure everyone in your household knows how and when to shut off water, gas and electricity at the main switches. Consult with your local utilities if you have questions.
- Take a first aid and CPR class. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter for more information.
- Think about ways you can help neighbors who may need special assistance, such as seniors or people with disabilities.
- Make arrangements for your pets. Pets usually are not allowed in public shelters. (Service animals are not pets, and are allowed in shelters.)
- Make sure that your health insurance policies are current and meet the needs of your household.
- Review any property and life insurance policies. Make sure they are current and that they meet your needs.
- Consider depositing some money in an “emergency” savings account that you can use in a crisis. If possible, keep a small amount of cash or traveler’s checks in a safe place at home where you can grab it quickly in case of an evacuation.

I have a disability. Is there any special emergency planning I should do?

If you have a disability or special need, you may have to take additional steps to protect yourself and your household in an emergency. If you know of friends or neighbors with special needs, you should help them with these extra precautions. For example:

- Hearing impaired people may need to make special arrangements to receive a warning.
- Mobility impaired people may need help getting to a shelter.
- Households with a single working parent may need help both planning for and responding to emergencies.
- Limited-English speaking people may need help planning for and responding to emergencies.
- People with special dietary needs should make sure they have an adequate emergency food supply.

Here are some special measures you can take, depending on your circumstances:

- Find out about special assistance that may be available in your community. Register with the office of emergency services or fire department for help.

- Create a network of neighbors, relatives, friends and coworkers to help you in an emergency. Discuss your needs and make sure they know how to operate necessary equipment.
- Discuss your needs with your employer.
- If you are mobility impaired and live or work in a high-rise building, have an escape chair.
- If you live in an apartment building, ask the manager to mark accessible exits clearly and to make arrangements to help you evacuate the building.
- Keep extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, catheters, medication, food for guide or hearing-ear dogs, or other items you might need. Also, keep a list of the type and serial numbers of medical devices you need.
- If you are a caregiver for a person with special needs, make sure you have a plan to communicate if an emergency occurs.

What materials should I have on hand in case of an emergency?

You should have enough materials to survive on your own for three days or more. This means having your own water, food and emergency supplies. Keep a **disaster supply kit** with essential food, water and supplies ready to “grab and go” in case you have to leave your home quickly because of a disaster. Use backpacks or duffel bags to keep the supplies together, and make sure all household members know where the kit is kept. You also should have a similar disaster supply kit at work, as well as a car kit with emergency food, water, flares, jumper cables and cold weather equipment.

What are the most important items to include in a disaster supply kit?

The most important items are **water, food, first-aid supplies, tools and emergency supplies, clothing and bedding**. Use the following checklists to create your disaster supply kit.

- ❑ **Water:** Store at least one gallon of water per person per day for drinking, cooking and washing. A normally active person needs at least two quarts of water daily just for drinking. Children, nursing mothers, and ill people need more. Very hot temperatures can double the amount of water needed. Store water in clean plastic, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers. Do not use glass or other breakable containers. Never use a container that has held toxic substances. Seal water containers tightly, label them, and store them in a cool, dark place.
- ❑ **Food:** Collect canned foods, dry mixes and other staples. Include items such as ready-to-eat meats, fruits, and vegetables; canned or boxed juices, dry soups; peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, trail mix; powdered milk

and cereals. Be sure to include a manual can opener. Replace items in your food supply every six months.

First aid supplies:

- ☐ First aid manual
- ☐ Sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes
- ☐ Assorted sizes of safety pins
- ☐ Cleaning agents (isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide)/soap/germicide
- ☐ Antibiotic ointment
- ☐ Latex gloves (2 pairs)
- ☐ Gauze pads and large bandages of assorted sizes
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Tweezers
- ☐ Antiseptic
- ☐ Thermometer
- ☐ Aspirin and non-aspirin pain reliever
- ☐ Antidiarrhea medication
- ☐ Extra pair of prescription glasses or contact lens

Tools and emergency supplies

- ☐ A portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries
- ☐ Flashlights and extra batteries
- ☐ Signal flare
- ☐ Matches in a waterproof container
- ☐ Wrench, pliers, shovel and other tools
- ☐ Duct tape and scissors
- ☐ Plastic sheeting
- ☐ Whistle
- ☐ Tube tent
- ☐ Work gloves
- ☐ Paper, pens and pencils
- ☐ Needles and thread
- ☐ Battery-operated travel alarm clock
- ☐ Manual can opener
- ☐ Mess kits or paper cups, plates and plastic utensils
- ☐ All-purpose knife
- ☐ Household liquid bleach to treat drinking water
- ☐ Sugar, salt, pepper
- ☐ Aluminum foil and plastic wrap
- ☐ Re-sealing plastic bags

Sanitation and hygiene items:

- ☐ Washcloth and towel
- ☐ Towelettes, soap, hand sanitizer, liquid detergent
- ☐ Tooth paste, toothbrushes, lip balm, sunscreen, insect repellent, mirror, feminine supplies
- ☐ Toilet paper and heavy-duty plastic garbage bags with ties

Household documents and contact numbers:

- ☐ Personal identification, cash or traveler's checks, and a credit card

- ❑ Emergency contact list and phone numbers
- ❑ Map of the area and phone numbers of place you could go

Clothes and bedding:

- ❑ One complete change of clothing and sturdy shoes for each household member, plus rain gear, hat and gloves, extra socks, extra underwear, sunglasses.
- ❑ Blankets or a sleeping bag for each household member.

For more information, visit these websites:

<http://www.fema.gov/library/prepandprev.shtm#plan>

<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/supplies.shtm>

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/>